

## TEARIN' THE HEART OUTTA SATURDAY NIGHT:

A look back at TNT Monstervision with an interview with Joe Bob Briggs and Honey Gregory

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On June 28th, 1996 cable television changed for many late night B-movie addicts. This was the premiere of Joe Bob Briggs [John Bloom] as host of TNT's Monstervision. The show had been previously broadcast with various hosts on the network ranging from Penn and Teller to Bob Denver, but the show hadn't managed to gain as wide of an audience as the network was anticipating. It was an era where the drive-in movie theater was seconds away from permanent death, the video store was booming, and pay cable was king. TNT was looking for a full time host for it's Friday night slot. Someone that could entrance an audience, with a wonderful blend of knowledge, humor and wit, who was also -- everyday person identifiable . They chose America's foremost drive-in movie expert and film critic personality, Joe Bob Briggs.

Briggs was hired to educate late night cable television subscribers. Regardless of the fact that the movies were edited by the TNT 'High Sheriffs' for content. The drive-in movie critic had arrived, and weekends wouldn't be the same for many ever again.

Prior to Monstervision, Joe Bob Briggs spent three years as a syndicated film critic for the Dallas Times Herald. His Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In column reviewed exploitation/horror and sexy B-movie's not covered by other film critics. At the same time, Briggs also began hosting low budget films on local Dallas access television. The Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In newspaper column ended in late '84 when the Brigg's parody of the U.S.A for Africa rock song 'We are the World' was appropriately made into 'We are the Weird'. The spoof drew much criticism and led to the cancellation of the Joe Bob Briggs print column and not so coincidentally the resignation of one columnist, named John Bloom. Both would return again to print a few years later on a larger scale.

Joe Bob Briggs hit the road with a developed stand-up/story-telling/musical comedy

act that took him across the U.S.A offering up his unique brand of humor to audiences everywhere. An Evening with Joe Bob Briggs re-titled later, Joe Bob Dead In Concert launched in Cleveland, OH. in late 1985 and the show received national notice.

On the success of Joe Bob Dead In Concert, Briggs was offered a spur-of-the-moment weekly hosting job, on the up and coming sister network of Showtime, The Movie Channel. And it's here where Briggs cut his teeth, and catapulted himself to becoming the greatest movie host of all time.

The Movie Channel was looking for someone to introduce several of the films they had recently acquired, thus was born the landmark cable series, Joe Bob's Drive-In Theater. Drive-In Theater ran for nearly ten years and became the cable networks highest rated show. Joe Bob's Drive-In Theater would be nominated for two Cable Ace Awards during its tenure on air. At the height of popularity, Briggs would host the pinnacle of pay-per-view B movie-ism with the 1994 Joe Bob's Hollywood's Hottest Babes special. The sixty-minute pay-per-view gift aired across the country and featured Briggs interviewing scream queens such as: Julie Strain, Michelle Bauer and Julie K. Smith. This was followed by slow motion segments of each women dancing nekkid in a hot tub, and at the end of the show an eight-hundred number was flashed across the screen allowing viewers to call in a vote for their favorite.

After almost a decade, The Movie Channel began to have major concerns over demographics, and it changed formats in 1996, and Briggs quickly transitioned to a Friday night slot on the Ted Turner TNT network. From the ashes of Drive-In Theater came the soon-to-be landmark and highly influential, TNT Monstervision.

The Monstervision format was similar to that of Joe Bob's Drive-In Theater, but unlike The Movie Channel series, Briggs was given even more time on-air. Often, Briggs would appear as many as sixteen to twenty-four times on-air during a weekly two film presentation on TNT. Similarly, to Drive-In Theater the Monstervision stage set was made to resemble a mobile home. Joe Bob sat in a leather recliner topped with steer horns. A green neon TNT sign was strategically placed in the background resembling a bug zapper. Movie posters of each night's features were placed on the wall's in the background and the Briggs home littered with dozens of empty beer cans, movie memorabilia, strange props and hidden nudie magazines. After all, Briggs was appealing to the common man within a certain age range, and the

hobbies of such were late night television, gross-out comedy, monster and action movies, and lots of beer.

Briggs had a truly unique system and vocabulary in which he would provide his audience highlights or stand out moments from any film he would be introducing each week. Briggs would dub these, the Drive-In Totals. The Drive-In Totals were based on the Briggs invented principle, that dictated that any great B-movie must contain all of the following three B's. Blood, Breasts and Beasts. This trademark transpired into invention years prior when Briggs interviewed B-movie mastermind Roger Corman back at his days at the Dallas Times Herald.

With the three B's ideology being marketed each week on air, and to appeal even more to the late night male viewer of *Monstervision*, TNT execs allowed Briggs to implement a character he had created back on-the-air during his Movie Channel days.

The character, a smart, sexy and sassy mail postal carrier. The *Monstervision* mail girl. The character would be played by many on-the-up actresses over the course of the show's history [1996-2000]. The overall series fan favorite and the original mail girl, Honey [Honey Gregory] followed Briggs to TNT from The Movie Channel in 1996. Honey would stay with the show for two seasons, and subsequent replacements followed over the course of the shows history before *Monstervision* was forced off the air in 2000. The mail girl character not only appealed to the shows demographic but also provided Briggs fan's each night with a humorous rapport between the two characters, which always showcased Briggs hilarious and embarrassing failed attempts at "bedding" his trailer park mail lady.

The chemistry between Honey and Briggs was quickly obvious. Both were Texans. The rehearsed banter seemed less scripted and more impromptu as the two would tease each other to the delight of the viewer each week. Although the mail girl character endured many scrutinies by feminists who felt the character was demeaning to women, *Monstervision* fans adored Honey and looked forward to the weekly mail girl visit as well as seeing her in many over-the-top sultry and exposing wardrobes.

In 1998, *Monstervision* moved from it's original Friday night time, to a new Saturday slot. With the constant airing on TNT of various sports broadcasts the show often

failed to begin at it's advertised time slot each week. This move also saw the creation of, Joe Bob's Last Call. This variation still meant Monstervision, but saw Briggs moving inside his trailer home where he would guide you through the final film of a two movie evening behind a Old Milwaukee "tall boy" nestled in a beer cozy, all the while Briggs resided at a diner booth looking directly into the camera. Brigg's schtick would become raunchier over the course of the evenings cinematic offerings and each weekly show would finish out with a joke that would become one of the series highlights.

In addition, TNT Monstervision was one of the first television series to heavily promote it's companion website. In an era where the internet was not yet in every home in the U.S, a scrolling banner reminded viewers to meet other fans of the show online on it's forum board also known as Joe Bob's Rec Room to discuss Briggs, the films of the evening, or make an attempt at the infamous caption contest. The caption contest allowed the fans of the series an attempt at "making the six headed jury laugh". This involved providing a caption for a weekly playmate. The playmates were not beautiful models, but still photos of "beasts" as seen in films that aired over the course of the Monstervision series run. The prize? The highly sought after and now very collectable Monstervision t-shirt.

Theme nights became abundant on the series as well. These theme nights were an extension of the classic drive-in movie aesthetic, a vital part of the Monstervision experience. Theme nights eventually carried over into yearly specials.

Halloween became a special night on Monstervision instantly. Halloween 1998 saw the one-time epic and now fan favorite famous Friday the 13th Dusk 'til Dawn marathon. Briggs introduced five of the Friday the 13th movies in a row. To the amusement of his audience, Briggs hammed it up pretending to be stalked by a killer that was roaming around the shows set rubbing out it's crew members one-by-one, only for Briggs to discover each grizzly execution prior to commercial break. The effort was unforgettable and fans of the series, today still discuss the one-off special. A subsequent Halloween special included the 1999 Nair Witch show. The Nair Witch special saw Briggs and his mail girl's [Rusty and Summer] lost in the woods of the Hollywood Hills searching out the elusive Nair Witch, a Blair Witch parody. In addition, slight spin-off variations of the concept were offered to fans of the series during it's run as well. Fans were treated to such seasonal special's as Joe Bob's Summer School, Joe Bob's Hollywood Saturday Night, even a one time big Monstervision Super Bowl marathon of '70s football movies that was co-hosted with Briggs by the one and only Fred 'The Hammer' Williamson.

Following the 1999 season, TNT proposed a format change for *Monstervision*. The show's production was relocated from Dallas to Los Angeles and with TNT deciding they'd like to focus on capturing a stronger female demographic, the network decided to cut back the two movie format into one and take it more "mainstream". The change to normalcy would not fare well for the series and with ratings down TNT cancelled the show without warning, airing the series last original episode on July 8th, 2000. The cancellation ended Joe Bob Briggs four year turn on the TNT network.

Today, the interest in the series is stronger than ever. With the outlet that the internet offers, fans of the show post dozens of rare YouTube clips as well as visit forum boards designed to offer fans the opportunity to swap recorded episodes of the series between each other. Fans continue to sign petitions to bring the series back to air. TNT *Monstervision* gave it's audience an outlet for appreciation. For genre and B-movie fans the series was a late night place of gathering. The party may be over, and the late night television landscape changed forever, but as Joe Bob Briggs has always said "The Drive-in will never die", and neither will TNT *Monstervision*. Viva la Joe Bob!

Justin & Tom: So how did you come up with the character of Joe Bob Briggs?

Joe Bob: Well, I wanted a character that was from my milieu. Someone that was from the Texas, Arkansas area. I wanted to play a character that liked movies, but hated film. I wanted a character that people could identify with, someone that was populous. Originally I thought I might play it multi-ethnic, 'cause the majority of people that went to drive-in's in Texas were Hispanic. The original name of the character was Bo Bo Rodriguez.

The newspaper editors I was writing for at the time wouldn't let me use that 'cause they thought it was racist, so I came up with Joe Bob Briggs cause it was the whitest and most redneck name I could think of at that time. Rednecks are the last ethnic group that you can pick on in America, and it's fun.

Justin & Tom: How did you get involved with The Movie Channel?

Joe Bob: I was on the set of Tobe Hooper's Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 and I interviewed Dennis Hopper for Rolling Stone Magazine. The Movie Channel noticed the article and also I had done a comedy tour across the U.S. So anyhow, at that time they were bringing in guest hosts for a month at a time. So one guest host spot, turned into another, then turned into three, and then it turned into a job. It was really by accident, 'cause they never really planned to hire anyone from the start.

Justin & Tom: So once the job at The Movie Channel was over how did you get the job on TNT Monstervision?

Joe Bob: Well there was about two months in between I think. After I did my final show on The Movie Channel someone called from TNT and asked if I wanted a Friday night slot. They liked the fact that I had a production company that could shoot really cheap, so we just used the sets from The Movie Channel on Monstervision.

Justin & Tom: The show was shot in Dallas, Texas?

Honey: Yeah, we shot in Dallas; It was at a couple different studios.

Justin & Tom: So were you picking the movies that you showed on The Movie Channel and TNT Monstervision?

Joe Bob: On The Movie Channel I was not picking the movies. They were buying a lot of bad movies and they seemed to always end up on my show. On the other side, Turner television had a huge library as they had bought a bunch of films from MGM in the early '80s. So once a year I would go through a big list of the films they owned and marked off the ones I wanted to show. Unfortunately they wouldn't show anything prior to 1975 or in black and white. So there were a lot of things that I would've liked to have shown but wasn't allowed to like Tod Browning's Freaks (1932).

In addition they bought movies or acquired the rights to particular movies, and those were mandatory for me to show 'cause they were required to air so many

times.

Justin: Like what?

Joe Bob: Well for example, there was this Filipino movie that they asked me to show called, Superbeast. If you've seen it, you know this movie has no plot whatsoever. I ran a contest where I asked for people to write in and successfully describe the plot of the movie, and the winner would receive a six pack of beer. Out of thousands of entries no-one ever got it right and I got in trouble with TNT for offering an alcohol prize. I guess you're not supposed to do that [laughing].

Justin & Tom: How did the TNT mail girl come into the equation?

Joe Bob: Well, I wanted a retro girl. I used to go to a lot of television development meetings, and they always wanted the mail girl to be strong and independent. Which is a cliché in a sense. So I suggested that they create a character that was similar to Carol Wayne. So I suggested that we make her sexy, and I'll hit on her, and she'll always shoot me down, and that will be her vengeance.

Justin & Tom: Honey, you were the very first Monstervision mail girl, how on earth did you get caught up in this role?

Honey: Well, I had an agent in Dallas. John's [Joe Bob Briggs] office just called over cause they were looking for girls. At that time he was looking for someone to do The Hubbie awards for the show on The Movie Channel.

John had me back another time after that appearance as he noticed that he was getting good feedback from his fans. So he started to write these quirky little things that they could stick me in on the show every now and again. Finally, I just asked him to put me on the show full time. After a while, he came up with the mail girl concept and he called me in. I, of course said "sounds like fun."

Justin & Tom: So as an actress how did you develop that character?

Honey: Well, we just tried a few different ideas. We tried stuff where she had different types of attitudes. We wanted to try to figure out what would stick. John liked it best when I was kind of snotty and uppity and hateful towards the Joe Bob character. You know, maybe I was a bit of a gold digger type 'cause I was looking for a guy that was the exact opposite of Joe Bob Briggs. If you look at it, Joe Bob Briggs was really just a cowboy with no money [laughing].

At Monstervision we pretty much kept the character the same, but towards the end we played around with some different attitudes where I was kind of nice, just to mix it up and make it more fun.

Justin & Tom: Who was the character of Honey to you? I'm curious to get any insight in terms of who you thought Honey was?

Honey: She was this kind of a trashy, bimbo, gold digging Marilyn Monroe type. She had that Marilyn Monroe sex appeal side to her, but ultimately she's just a normal postal lady running around half naked.

Justin & Tom: So who picked out your own outfits for the show?

Honey: Well, both John and I did. I would meet with the wardrobe lady prior to shooting and bring some of my things, while the wardrobe lady brought some items, so we kind of mixed and matched. Towards the end, more and more of the costumes belonged to the show.

There was one particular costume which we had a lot of compliments on, it was a little blue jean short sleeve shirt about two sizes too small. I would put on a push up bra and hold the front of the shirt together while the wardrobe lady would take fishing line and literally sew me into the top. It fit like a corset and you couldn't even breathe, but it would make my girls really pop. We got a lot of really good reviews from that particular piece of wardrobe.

Justin: Joe Bob, Can you clarify the correct order of appearance of the TNT mail girl



over the run of the series?

Joe Bob: Well, Honey was the first. She came over from The Movie Channel with me. The women in the marketing department hated the whole concept of the mail girl, and were always trying to get rid of it. Eventually I was forced to re-cast the role. If it had been up to me I would've kept Honey forever, 'cause she was the most popular with the fans.

After Honey came Reno, but I can't remember why we had to replace her. Then came Summer. Summer was played by a friend of mine, Kathy Shower. Kathy was the 1985 Playboy Playmate of the Year. She wanted to do it even though the money was terrible, 'cause we were good friends. TNT execs thought that she was too old for the show, 'cause she billed herself as the oldest Playboy Playmate. She was there for a few months, then Rusty [Renner St. John] came in.

What people don't know about Rusty is that she had served in Operation Desert Storm in the United States Air Force. Her father was also a general in the U.S. Army. She was very serious. She was a pilot for General H. Norman Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Storm. Once she got out she wanted to pursue a career in acting and modeling. She was quite good, and second most popular after Honey. Rusty stayed with the series until it finished out.

Justin: So Honey, Did you know at the time that the TNT marketing execs were trying to eliminate the mail girl character during your era on the show?

Honey: John [Joe Bob Briggs] never discussed those kind of business issues with me, but sometimes he would make comments about how he was getting slack from feminists who didn't like how my character was being portrayed. They thought the character was degrading to women. I think John was right because he wasn't trying to be politically correct on that show. His target market was primarily males age twelve between forty and that demographic typically like trappy, sexy, over the top women.

Some of his comments he made to me or during the show was that they didn't like my name being Honey. John thought it was funny because 'Honey' is my real name. They thought he made up the name. John loved calling me 'Honey, Baby, Sugar',

you know all that kind of stuff. I think it just a different culture. I still get people saying darling and sweetheart whenever I go home to Texas.

Justin: Honey, One thing in particular I really liked about you on the show is that you weren't as nasty to Joe Bob as the other subsequent girls. So I have to ask if there was ever a secret love affair between Honey and Joe Bob Briggs?

Honey: I would say no. I think it was always Joe Bob's fantasy to have an affair, but he was just annoying, and bordering on sexual harassment. No didn't mean no to him, it just meant not at this time. There are moments when she would break down just a little bit, like she was maybe secretly a little attracted to him, but then he would open his mouth and she would be turned off again.

Justin & Tom: A fan favorite segment on TNT Monstervision was when you'd read the fan mail on the air from prison inmates from around the country. How much mail did you actually get from prisons?

Joe Bob: We got a lot of letters from prisoners. I think everyone on television gets letters from prison, but they get ignored, we celebrated them. Quite a few prisons have cable television. I'm a big supporter of it. But there are some out there that don't. Wardens support it, 'cause it helps keep everything relaxed and settled.

The most of it came from prisons in California, and then also a state prison in upstate Pennsylvania called, Camp Hill. We got letters from Robert Bardo, the guy who murdered television actress Rebecca Schaeffer. I wrote to the authorities at Vacaville prison saying that I didn't think this guy should be allowed to write letters to people on television [laughing].

Justin: Honey, I know the show got a ton of mail. How much of that mail was for you?

Honey: Well I don't know the percentage, but John would bring me letters that were specifically addressed to the mail girl. A lot of times people would write John a letter and say something about the mail girl. I did have quite a large following of

incarcerated folks that though. He would tease me sometimes that I had a captive audience [laughing].

Justin: So how did the 'Tearing the Heart Out Of Saturday Night' song come into being?

Joe Bob: The marketing department came up with that. They wrote it, I didn't write it. I've written some songs but not that one. It was basically just a commercial for the show.

Justin & Tom: I think one of the greatest TNT Monstervision shows was when you did the Friday The 13th Dusk 'till Dawn marathon show in 1998. Why didn't you do another one, and wasn't it supposed to be an annual tradition?

Joe Bob: Yeah, it was. But it was sort of difficult 'cause each week our show was never on at the same time. It was also delayed by basketball or ice skating or something like that. The programming on TNT reset itself at 6 a.m. every day, so no matter what we showed it had to be wrapped up by 6 a.m.

So while I would've loved to do more of those marathons they were difficult to work 'cause of that reason, but also because we only had temporary rights to those Friday The 13th movies, and not necessary another block of films with sequels ready to show.

Justin: You interviewed so many actors and actresses on the show, do you have a favorite looking back now?

Joe Bob: It was great interviewing Clint Howard cause he was right there with us in the moment. Then Tippi Hedren and John Waters. Gary Busey was great. Robert Forrester was great. Also, Lance Hendriksen was my favorite 'cause he was just so honest with me. He's a guy that's rarely interviewed and doesn't like to be interviewed. So he was probably my favorite interview that I did on the show.

Justin: So Honey, how did you leave the show? Did they let you go?

Honey: Actually, I left the country to pursue a Master's degree. I spent a year in Switzerland and a year in London. I had talked to John about flying me in to make an appearance but it never materialized. It was just too expensive to do that, so they brought another girl in to replace me.

Justin: So why did TNT Monstervision go off the air?

Joe Bob: Monstervision went off the air 'cause the network was attempting to be more female friendly. They were interested in having a stronger female demographic. They were buying more shows with female perspectives. They did try to save the show. They moved us to Los Angeles and we had to show more mainstream movies. We had been shooting the show in Texas all this time, and it was cheap to make. So when we moved they realized just how expensive it was to shoot the show in Hollywood.

Eventually they didn't wanna pay for it anymore, and that's how it ended. I was always trying to get more females to watch the show, but the show was always very heavily male [laughing].

Justin & Tom: TNT Monstervision has been off the air for ten plus years now, what do you think resonates so well with people that they are still interested in it all these years later?

Honey: I think John's humor. It's so unique. When it comes to movies nobody does it quite the way he does.

Justin & Tom: You've since been approached to come back to television haven't you over the years since Monstervision has been off the air?

Joe Bob: Well yes and no, but not really. We did a little twenty-thousand dollar pilot for C.M.T Country Music Television a couple years ago, but it wasn't well thought

out, and I really didn't like it. Cable Vision was gonna do a pop culture network and I was going to be on there, but it never launched. There have been a few more things like that, but they never took off.

Networks aren't looking for people to host movies anymore. It's an extra expense for them. They've already licensed the movie, and now they've gotta spend money on a host?

Justin: What are you working on now?

Joe Bob: I'm, well John Bloom is working on a new book about military satellites in outer space.

Justin: Do you have a favorite Monstervision moment?

Joe Bob: I have favorite bits that we would do. Some of them aren't necessarily audience favorites though. We did this bit on condom testing that I kinda liked. I really loved the night that we showed *The Warriors* (1979) and we mapped out their travels through Manhattan.

Also, one of my favorite things to do was when we would show a time travel movie and I'd talk about the second law of thermal dynamics, and how that made time travel possible [laughing]. We had a blackboard and we'd show the timeline, and how your head would explode if you actually went through the time machine [laughing]. I don't know how many people will remember that [laughing].

Justin & Tom: As everyone is dying to know, whatever happened to your ex-wife Wanda Bodean?

Joe Bob: Wanda Bodean split years ago as I'm sure you know already, and last I had heard she had went lesbo. [laughing]

Justin & Tom: Honey, Do you think Joe Bob ever wore you down? Like maybe once in Las Vegas at a vulnerable moment or during a night of drinking together he finally got to you ?

Honey: There were a couple times when you kind of wonder. There was a New Years Eve episode we did where everybody begins the evening kind of stiff and as the night goes along everybody gets a little more loose, drinks a little more and start acting a little goofy. Then at the conclusion, Honey the Mail Girl is laying in a bed with her clothes messed up while Joe Bob is sitting on the foot of the bed and you kind of wonder if something happened. I think people wanted them to finally come together but it never quite happens. Or did it? [laughing]